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ABSTRACT

In a speech on the development of formalized systems for distance education, the British Open University is highlighted. Three themes are addressed: (1) objectives, methods, and evaluation of Great Britain's Open University, (2) examination and comparison of similar institutions in other countries, and (3) development of guidelines for initiation of similar institutions. The communications explosion has led to a worldwide trend toward participative democracy. First prompted by politicians and then by government, the Open University was designed to give excluded students a second chance at higher education. Access was to be easy, but there would be no compromise on materials or academic standards. There would be no qualifications, costs would be reasonable, and education would be taken to students. Radio and television would serve as adjuncts. Since 1971, over 120,000 have been admitted, with course success rate being about 70-75%. The university has largely achieved its objectives, and the British academic world has accepted the degree in standard. Success has led to world interest in the distance learning concept, though foreign countries address differently their needs, populations, and financing. One shared concept is that it is possible and practical to educate through nontraditional modes. It can be concluded that, among other things, courses must be specifically designed for the target population, and one should make use of available mass communication systems. (CSS)

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TEACHING AND LEARNING AT A DISTANCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF BRITAIN'S OPEN UNIVERSITY

(WESBROOK MEMORIAL ALUMNI LECTURE)

SIR WALTER PERRY

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CENTRE FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION, THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER, CANADA

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C O N T E N T

	Page
About This Series and This Paper	i
Foreword	iii
Teaching and Learning at a Distance: The Experience of Britain's Open University	1
Appendix	17

ABOUT THIS SERIES AND THIS PAPER

This Occasional Paper is the fifteenth in a series being published by the Centre for Continuing Education. Our aim is to contribute to the field of adult education by publishing monographs which originate here at The University of British Columbia and are deemed to be worthy of reaching a wider audience than would otherwise be the case.

During the last two years, interest in distance education among educators and among the general population in British Columbia was awakened by several initiatives. Among these were the Winegard Commission, the Faris Committee, the Open College Committee and the Distance Education Planning Group. The three universities increased their distance education credit programs and worked on proposals for further development. Most recently the Ministry of Education announced plans to utilize the experience and some of the courses prepared by the British Open University, in its program to deliver adult basic education, vocational and career education, and university credit courses to the population of British Columbia.

It is very fitting at this time that we were able to benefit from the experience of Sir Walter Perry, first Vice Chancellor of the Open University, who in his Wesbrook Memorial Alumni Lecture outlined the background of the success of this truly innovative institution in Great Britain, pointed out some of the developments abroad inspired by the Open University, and offered some advice on what to do and what to avoid in establishing a similar distance-learning institution.

The Centre for Continuing Education is pleased to be able, in cooperation with the UBC Alumni Association, to publish the text of Sir Walter Perry's Wesbrook Memorial Alumni Lecture and to make it available to educators and other interested persons in British Columbia.

Jindra Kulich
Director

F O R E W O R D

UBC's first President, Dr. Frank Fairchild Wesbrook, died at his home in Vancouver on October 20th, 1918, three years after he assumed presidency of the newly chartered University. The Alumni Association, small as it was, resolved in 1919 to provide an annual memorial in Wesbrook's name. The effects of two wars and a depression prevented carrying out the plan until the 50th anniversary of his death (1968); the Association established a major memorial lectureship that is given when a particularly distinguished visitor can deliver an important address to a distinguished British Columbia audience that is eager to hear it.

On February 16th, 1978, in conjunction with the Wesbrook Memorial Alumni Lectureship Committee, the UBC Alumni Association was fortunate to bring another outstanding speaker to our province, Sir Walter Perry, Vice Chancellor and chief administrator of Britain's Open University, who delivered the 1978 Wesbrook Memorial Lecture.

In his introduction, Sir Walter Perry referred to the contribution of Dr. Frank Fairchild Wesbrook, and that of another outstanding Canadian educator, Dr. William C. Gibson, as follows:

> "The foundation of The University of British Columbia - of which Wesbrook was the principal architect - was one of the critical factors in the development of the educational services of this province; but there is another contribution to that development which is closely linked to this evening - namely that Dr. Gibson's father was responsible for the creation of the system of correspondence education in the province as early as 1929. So the association of Open University, the newest of Britain's universities and an institution devoted to distance-learning, with the Wesbrook Lecture, chaired by Dr. Gibson, is perhaps appropriate in terms of past history. I hope it will also turn out to be appropriate in terms of the future history of your educational system."

Dr. Frank Wesbrook played an important role in developing higher education in the province of British Columbia. The university which he founded eventually has come into its own and remains a monument to the unquenchable fire of a great man with imagination.

Alumni and those associated with higher education in British Columbia are encouraged to join in the discussion of the objectives, problems and benefits of providing greater access to higher education in British Columbia through the techniques of distance education. As Wesbrook said:

> "To us has come the opportunity of making our province...a better place in which to live...to meet in full our obligation, may ours be a provincial university without provincialism. May our sympathies be so broadened and our services be extended to all the people of the province that we may indeed be the people's university whose motto is 'Tuum est'." (It is yours - it is up to you.)

Harry J. Franklin
Executive Director
UBC Alumni Association

TEACHING AND LEARNING AT A DISTANCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF BRITAIN'S OPEN UNIVERSITY

May I start by thanking The University of British Columbia and its Alumni Association for doing me the honour of inviting me to give this lecture. I am all the more conscious of the honour since I am aware that the credit belongs to the Open University - to its staff and its students - rather than to me.

The foundation of The University of British Columbia - of which Wesbrook was one of the principal architects - was one of the critical factors in the development of the educational services of this province; but there is another contribution to that development which is closely linked to this evening - namely that I have learned Dr. Gibson's father was responsible for the creation of a system of correspondence education in the province as early as 1929. So the association of the Open University, the newest of Britain's universities and an institution devoted to distance-learning, with the Wesbrook Lecture, chaired by Dr. Gibson, is perhaps appropriate in terms of past history. I hope it will also turn out to be appropriate in terms of the future history of your educational system.

I thought I might take three themes this evening. The first, the objectives that led to the creation of the Open University, the methods by which the university set about fulfilling them and the extent to which it has succeeded. The second is the development in a number of other countries of institutions of a similar nature - and how far the objectives and systems of those institutions coincide with or differ from those of the Open University. The third is the extent to which experience so far in the rest of the world has provided guidelines that can help other educational authorities to decide whether - and how - to proceed to establish similar kinds of institutions.

The Open University is one example of a new pattern of higher education; but it is only one of a number of new patterns that have been woven over the last twenty years, during which there has been an increasing challenge to the traditional shape of a university. How can we account for the storm that most of us have witnessed in what was, for a very long time, the calm sea of higher education? - a storm that has undoubtedly made a lot of academics very sea-sick!

Let me try to pick out the critical features of the traditional pattern of higher education that was common to most universities throughout the world before the storm broke. First and foremost, higher education was the culminating stage of a continuous period of initial education that began at primary school. By the age of about 18, students who had succeeded in obtaining good grades moved from school to university. It therefore followed that university entrants were a relatively homogeneous group and a start could be made by university teachers in the confident expectation that all the students had in the previous years studied and obtained credits at school in the subject to a given level. Second, higher education involved residence by day - and often by night - in the university with a consequential close exposure to fellow-students and staff; and the teaching methods were based upon this close contact. Face-to-face tuition in lectures, seminars and tutorials was the cornerstone of the system and the library and the laboratory provided the back-up resources. Third, the courses that were taught were discipline-based. Control of teaching was vested in the department, often, indeed, in the head of department, whose highest ambition was often to produce the next generation of scholars in his own image. Thus the nurture of excellence was a paramount objective. This wholly is admirable and was a vital feature of university education. It did, however, mean that for those students who were neither scholars nor excellent, the courses were often inappropriate to their own needs. Finally, and for a number of reasons, some good, some bad, the system was frankly elitist. There was often competition for entry and for survival in, the system; the cost of higher education either overt as fees or covert in the form of loss of income to the family could and did militate against the poor; the concentration upon the needs of the scholar could be a positive disadvantage to the non-scholar who was primarily concerned with obtaining a qualification that would act as a vocational passport.

There was much that was admirable in this traditional pattern. Society looked to the universities for the nurture of what Ashby has called "the thin clear stream of excellence" and for the production of its future leaders. The universities were the centres of research and of scholarship in the disciplines represented, and maintained high standards in both. Such failings as there were, were accepted as the necessary price that had to be paid to secure these benefits.

But very great changes were going on in the world, changes that were to have profound effects on this traditional system. Most of them stemmed from the technological revolution, and many from the communications explosion that was a major feature of that revolution. Radio, television, the telephone, air travel all meant that events all over the world were known to everyone with an immediacy and a drama never hitherto experienced. Ordinary people became aware for the first time of global problems and of unrealised potential; and awareness bred concern, which in turn, led to two new demands, first for education, which was necessary for an understanding of the problems and potentials, and, second, for the right to participate which was necessary in order to exert any influence upon the course of events.

The demand for education stemming from the people themselves was reinforced by the needs of society for more trained manpower for the maintenance of the new technology and there was a tremendous expansion in the provision of higher education, first in the developed countries and later in the developing ones. This expansion was perhaps the first major factor in producing the storm in the educational sea. But, concurrently, the technological revolution had itself another affect, it increased many-fold the costs of research in the universities. Thus the total national expenditure on higher education rose dramatically in every country both for this reason and because of the increase in student numbers. Governments faced with spending increasing proportions of their income on education became increasingly concerned with obtaining value for money. No longer were they prepared to let university academics run teaching programmes for ever-increasing numbers of students in the traditional pattern. Indeed poorer developing countries could not even contemplate such levels of expenditure. All this was to lead to political interest in and pressure for new and cheaper patterns of higher education more relevant to <u>their</u> ideas of what the national need was.

The worldwide trend towards participative democracy that stemmed from the communications explosion was to have another unforeseen effect on the universities, for it was undoubtedly one cause of the great student unrest of the sixties. Students, as young adults, wanted to participate too. They demanded a greater voice in university government, in the nature of the courses that were taught. Furthermore, concerned as they were about global problems, they wanted courses that were "relevant" in this sense. They saw that discipline-based courses were not directly relevant but at the same time they

failed to appreciate that real insight into global problems would depend upon bringing the expertise of many disciplines to bear upon them; that their demand for immediate relevance was therefore often a mirage. Yet, on the other hand, the pre-occupation of the disciplinary-based teaching with scholarship often obscured rather than revealed the application of the discipline to any global problem whatsoever; and, in this sense, the universities often failed to meet a deeply felt student need.

Another potent influence was that, at the very time that society needed more scientists and technologists to cope with the effects of the technological revolution, the awareness and concern of people about those global problems which had arisen because of the uncritical exploitation of technology for instance (the problem of pollution for example) was breeding amongst the young a revulsion from science and technology and a desire to seek, for instance through a study of the social sciences, solutions to the problems of society. The fact that the social sciences could offer no answers, no solutions, frequently added to the disillusionment of students. Furthermore, the imbalance between the student numbers in science and in the social sciences compared with government estimates of national needs in these areas aggravated the concern of governments to find new patterns.

The growth of demand for education and for participation was by no means confined to the young. There was a great upsurge of interest in adult education, in providing opportunities for those who had been denied them by the elitist selection system for school-leavers that was inherent in the traditional pattern of higher education; and this called for new patterns, for there were virtually insuperable difficulties in fitting adults into the traditional one. Concurrently we were developing an awareness that, after the technological revolution, initial education could no longer fit a man to practice his profession for the whole of his career. The pace of change was too great - he would be out of date within a few years. A few thinkers began to develop the concept of continuing education, not only as an extra but even as an alternative to initial education. "Deschooling" became a popular if never an attractive word. The high level of motivation of adults who had some experience of life outside the world of education had been noted amongst ex-servicemen students after the war, and was contrasted with the frequent low level of motivation and sense of purpose observed in many of the new school-leaver undergraduates.

Finally, the communications explosion brought with it an awareness that the drama and the immediacy, offered by radio, and even more by television, provided a new means of instruction, of training, of education, that was a potential rival to the traditional pattern based on face-to-face contact. Numerous experiments were made, most attended by a singular lack of success, attributable, I believe, more to a misguided and inept use of the media than to any intrinsic unsuitability on their part.

I have tried to sketch in a simplistic picture of the background, of the main trends towards change, against which new patterns of higher education emerged at that time. None of these new patterns has yet been accepted by the world of higher education except on a very experimental basis. In the developed countries there is an immense inertia in the traditional system so that the force required to produce any change must be immensely powerful. The inertia stems in part from the wholly justifiable belief that the traditional system has worked well for centuries and the consequent distrust of any proposed change; partly it stems from the vested interests in maintaining it for commercial reasons; and partly from the fear of redundancy on the part of those who work in it. In the developing countries, who are beginning the task of building their own systems of higher education, there is a natural suspicion of any suggestion that they should build upon a new pattern when the developed countries still stick with the old one. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why the Open University has become the focus of such intense interest from the developing countries, for it is one of the very few instances where, in a developed country, a new pattern has been introduced on a large scale and has succeeded in co-existing with the traditional pattern and acting as a complementary part of a national system of education.

In the United Kingdom all these influences for change were present by the late 1960s. Furthermore, the traditional university system in Great Britain was the most highly selective, the most elitist in the world, admitting to university each year only less than 5 percent of the age group of school-leavers. All the indications were that there was a large untapped pool of able adults who had been denied the opportunity of higher education. The country could ill afford this neglect of its potential intellectual resources.

The idea of an Open University was first promoted by politicians and then by government. It was not by any means a child of the educational establishment

which, indeed, was almost uniformly sceptical, was often pouring ridicule and was sometimes actively hostile to the concept. So indeed was the quality press, the civil service, the Conservative Party, and most of the intelligentsia. They expressed themselves as sympathetic to the primary objectives (although I take leave to doubt if the sympathy was always genuine) but raised such questions as:

- would there really be a lasting demand?
- would there not be a drop-out of over 90 percent as in most correspondence courses?
- could anyone actually be educated without face-to-face contact with academics?
- would it not then be extremely expensive and open-ended in cost?
- would it not appeal largely to the bored elderly middle class housewife who would make little contribution to the needs of society even if successful?
- would the courses not be in "hobbies" - like so much of adult education?
- would not any qualification be second-rate and therefore useless?
- was the need not much more for extension of pre-university education?
- would the job not be done by the existing universities?
- could the money not be better employed by expanding existing adult educational services?

I don't know how many of you have read F.M. Cornford's Microcosmographia Academica. It is required reading for all my staff. One of his theories is "There is only one argument for doing something; and rest are arguments for doing nothing". And all these questions are arguments for doing nothing. What then was the argument for doing something - what were the primary objectives of the Open University?

It was designed to offer a second chance of higher education to all those who for any reason at all had been denied or had not taken advantage of the opportunity of higher education on leaving school. It was to make no compromise on academic standards but it was to make access easy. The latter principle demanded three things, first that there should be no qualification required for entry, because as soon as you put qualifications for entry in the way of adults

they will not go back to school to get them; second that the costs should not put it beyond the reach of the poor; and third, that the method of study should take education to the student, so that he or she could remain in full employment living at home, and should not require the student to attend an institution.

It was therefore absolutely essential to adopt, as an article of faith, - and I assure you it was an article of faith as there was no evidence to support it - the idea that the traditional face-to-face methods of education were not necessary however much this might be desired and could be dispensed with. What evidence there was, was in fact against it. Correspondence education had almost always failed, in that the success rates usually ran at under 10 percent. Television and radio were recognised as useful ancillaries to the traditional pattern, but could not be envisaged as substitutes; you couldn't really expect someone to get a degree by watching the telly. Was it possible that a combination of all these different things, together with any other distance communication methods that could be devised, could work?

The learning materials that had to be developed had to be of very high quality and well presented, for, if a student got stuck, access to a tutor could never be easy - so that remedial face-to-face help would often be unavailable or available only after a delay. Second, the isolated student could not rely on the stimulation, competition or help derived from classmates in the traditional institutions. The loneliness of the long-distance learner is very real and his motivation will flag if the learning materials are not themselves stimulating, for they are his main contact with the University.

How far have these objectives been met? Well over 300,000 adults in Britain have, since 1971, applied for entry. We have admitted over 120,000 of them, constrained only by the funds available to us, not at all by the imposition of any system of selection. Indeed, it is a case of first-come first-served. We have produced some 28,000 graduates, and currently there are some 60,000 still studying. The success rate in individual courses is remarkably steady at about 70-75 percent. Of the first cohort of students, who started in 1971, 52 percent have already graduated. And all these things have happened alongside an acceptance by the academic world in Britain that the degree is equivalent in standard to that of any British university. It is not equivalent in content at all, but it is equivalent in standard.

Indeed we have just carried out a survey of a sample of 4,000 of our graduates. This showed that no fewer than 1,000 had already applied for entry to post-graduate programmes in other universities and colleges; and that, of the 1,000, no fewer than 867 had been accepted. This must be as high a proportion as that achieved by the graduates of any other university. This is the best - and incontrovertible evidence that, in academic circles, the Open University degree has been recognised as equivalent to any other.

What of the other factors? Let me consider four of them. First, the cost. To produce one course - approximately equal to 2½ courses in Canada (they need 8 courses for a degree, compared to 20, I think in Canada) - calls for an initial expenditure of about $1 - 1.5 million. So if a course attracts 1,000 students each year and has a life of 5 years, the initiation cost per student is about $300. To teach one student that course costs about half as much again, so that the total cost to the university for one student for a year is about $700. This is about 1/5 of the cost in a traditional British university. But it is entirely dependent upon having very large numbers of students. If only 100 students instead of 1,000 were to study the course each year the cost would rise by ten-fold in initiation terms. It is disastrous to start an institution of this sort on a pilot scale. Big may not be beautiful - but it is at least cheap! The real miracle in Britain was that, without any evidence that it would succeed, the government made the positively enormous investment. Faith indeed!

Second, the courses. Have they offered students the sort of education they wanted? Our students can select for themselves - unconstrained by any regulations; and it turns out they make very sensible selections. In fact, I think, they may be too conservative sometimes. I think we have succeeded in offering courses that are seen to be highly relevant, that deal with problems that concern the students. We do not always succeed and some courses have been withdrawn because they are not wanted by enough students. We sometimes make very poor courses. But, by and large, the very fact that our courses are on public display, on open-circuit radio and television, on sale in the bookshops, calls forth from academics a very high quality of product, a quality which in my experience in other universities before I joined the Open University is seldom matched by the lectures delivered behind the closed doors of the classroom.

Third, the students. They are drawn from all classes and all occupations. Increasingly, we have attracted the less well qualified, the working men and women, although they are still less numerous in absolute terms than the qualified middle class. The modal age is 26 when they start in the university, although some 7 percent are over 50 and we have a few graduates of over 80. The primary characteristic of all these students is staying power. This must be one of the most difficult ways of getting a degree ever invented by the wit of man. Courage and determination that stem from intense motivation are obvious qualities of the graduate.

We have always imposed a lower age limit of 21 on our entrants. But being wholly pragmatic, it was to avoid making the other universities more hostile by appearing to compete with them for the 18 year olds. But the interest of the government, aroused no doubt by the prospect of a cheaper pattern of higher education, forced us to admit experimental groups of 500 younger students in each of three successive years. The results have been published in an interim report. There were few applicants, many of those offered entry rejected the offer, large numbers dropped out in the first year and the pass rate of those who stayed was lower than that for older students. The only bright factor was that those who succeeded in their first year performed in later years just as well as their older counterparts. This result was not unexpected. I always thought that a factor of maturity would be an essential element for success in a system as different as this. I do not think that the distance-learning pattern is suited to school-leavers at all.

Fourth and last, the mass media of communication - radio and television. I think we have shown, beyond any shadow of doubt, that, to offer degrees by distance-learning, there simply can never be enough broadcasting time available to use television or radio as the main media of instruction. If, for instance, we were to present the content of our printed materials in the form of lectures delivered on TV, we would require for each course, about 200 hours of transmission time. With our current projected profile of 87 such courses, we would need, altogether 17,400 hours of TV time, spread over 32 weeks, that's 544 hours per week. This would require broadcasting from 7am until 11pm seven days a week on 5 national networks. This is manifestly a <u>reductio ad absurdum</u>. Broadcasting is too expensive to waste on things that can be dealt with by the printed word. Television is too expensive to do things that can be done on radio, and radio is too expensive to do things than can be done by the printed

word. Television and radio are invaluable adjuncts, to be used when a moving video-signal or when an audio-signal is essential for understanding or comprehension. They will tend to be used well when they remain a scarce resource. They have, I am sure, a drama and an immediacy that are very valuable in maintaining motivation; and, they act as a pacing mechanism without which many students might drop out.

I would, therefore, claim that, by and large, the university has succeeded in achieving the objectives that were set for us. That is not to say that we do not have worries. Fees have been forced up by government to keep pace with inflation which has also increased the costs of books and travel, so that the poorest in the population are now discouraged, putting the principle of egalitarianism at risk. But the demand overall has been sustained over 9 years, the success rate is high and standards have been maintained. I think it's fair to say we silenced the prophets of doom! - at least we have done so in Britain.

This brings me to my second theme, for our very success has led us to become the focal point of world interest in the concept of distance-learning. There are now Open Universities on a pattern that has some similarities to ours in a number of countries. I will try to describe them in reference to certain ways they differ from us.

Almost always when an approach is made to us by an overseas government or institution it is along the lines that "we are going to make our own courses. We can do it quite well. But can you help us devise a suitable delivery system". This is nearly always in direct contradistinction to our own view of the situation which is that course materials - especially in science, technology and mathematics are international in currency; but that our delivery system was based on the communications network preexisting in the UK and cannot, therefore, be expected to function smoothly in any other country.

Accepting the truth of this generalisation we are usually faced with asking our visitors very basic questions: What? To whom? How? and Why?

If one asks what? The primary objective of the Open University is, as I have indicated, to offer a second chance of a higher education to adults. This is not always the primary objective of other Open University systems. In Pakistan and Iran, both of which have functioning Open Universities now, one major objective is to teach the adult population about primary health care and

simple tropical agriculture at a level way below a university degree. In Germany the major aim is to increase the production of lawyers, economists and mathematicians, all of whom were in short supply. In Australia the objective is to improve the quality of school teachers in the outback. In the USA there were many systems usually used to provide a limited range of first year courses; basically a means of attracting students to full-time on-campus education.

Thus, in essence, the distance-learning system is being applied to supply wholly different national needs. All of which are perfectly proper. The courses in Pakistan and Iran are very different from the content of the courses in Germany and Britain and there is little chance of exchanging courses to extend the choice of the student in both systems.

To whom? Similar differences exist in the nature of the target audience. In some countries the target audience consists of school-leavers rather than of adults. In Iran and in Venezuela many students will be young. In Venezuela 65 percent of the population are under 18 and the remaining 35 percent must try to educate them. The idea of trying to do it using our kind of system is beyond imagination. So the answer to the question when the target audience is different will similarly be different. This will have a profound affect on the answers to the later question of "how" - as we shall see. Some countries, like Germany and Australia have entrance qualifications as stringent as those for conventional universities. They are thus dealing with a much more homogeneous target audience than are those systems, like ours, which have no such entry qualifications. Then, again, the unqualified adult population is never a homogeneous whole so that the higher the intellectual demand of a course the smaller the fraction of the adult population to which it will appeal. Courses in bringing up children will appeal to a very large number of adults - but you cannot appeal to very large numbers with courses in nuclear physics.

How? The answers to this question fall into two categories, namely those dealing with the nature of the government structure of the institution and those dealing with the use of the media. Structurally the Open Universities of the UK, Germany, Iran and Pakistan are independent institutions set up and financed by government. In Israel the Open University is financed and run by private donations. In Australia and in the USA the open-learning systems are run either by an existing university or by a consortium of existing universities. The effects of such structural differences are quite striking.

Independent institutions are free of any traditional constraints and can usually be more adventurous in their course offerings. Sometimes, as in Germany, however, central government control limits on the curriculum in all universities constrains even the independent Open University. Furthermore, when a system is run by an existing university there is inevitably a tendency to use, for the adult distance-learner, the same courses as are offered to the full-time on-campus student. This is frequently misguided, for the adult has needs that are specific to him and that are not shared by the adolescent.

Finally, the independent institution can hire faculty whose primary loyalty is given to it. This can usually not be achieved by institutions run by conventional universities where the distance-teaching is seen as an extra duty by staff primarily concerned naturally with their full-time undergraduates, their graduate students and their research.

Turning to the answers based on the use of the media of communications we once again find great diversity. In many countries postal systems are very primitive. In the Open University in the UK a student sends an essay to his tutor, who marks it and sends it on to the University where it is recorded and returned to the student; and this can usually be accomplished in 10-14 days, so this is a relatively quick feed-back to the student - which is a vital part of the learning process. Such a service is unachievable in the USA, in Venezuela and in Pakistan - and perhaps in Canada. Other methods of distribution must therefore be devised to suit the local conditions.

Similarly TV coverage varies enormously, as does the control of the TV networks. Thus in the USA, there is often transmission time available on a local station but seldom on a national network. In South Africa until recently there wasn't any TV at all. Yet here in British Columbia, where you have a cable TV system, you may have no shortage of channels available. In Pakistan, although there is a national transmission network, there is little chance that the average student will possess a TV set.

Where post and TV or radio are not available, the delivery system is, perforce, based more upon a network of local study centres where course materials can be picked up, where TV or radio sets or cassettes are available, and where - often - tutorial help can be provided. It is rather like a set of mini campuses rather than a distance-learning system.

We can offer no ready-made solution; but often, after a while, we are being asked about our course materials. It's soon discovered that it is an expensive business to rediscover the wheel - and it is often possible to use what already exists.

The last question is then why? What is the essential motive underlying the proposal to create an Open University system? The answers vary enormously. In Mexico, the answer I got was "to keep at least some undergraduates off the campus". In Pakistan the aim is to produce a rapid improvement in basic community skills. In Venezuela it is to increase the rate of production of graduates in the initial education programme. In our case it is to provide a second chance to adults.

One can only conclude that there are no two institutions which would give the same answer to all these questions. All these Open University systems differ in almost every respect. Nevertheless they do share one simple concept, namely that it is possible and practicable to educate students by modes other than those which have been hallowed by tradition in the universities of the world.

One final word about the growth of the number of systems. If only there were a number of Open University systems. If only they were producing courses for these, and if only there was an international clearing house where the courses could be exchanged, it would be possible to increase the choice of courses available to students, without increasing the initiation costs, a major part of the total expenditure.

Let me then turn to my third theme. Can we derive from all these experiments generalisations that are of value in planning new systems. I think we can and I shall try:

(1) If the target population is adults:

(a) the courses must be specially designed to suit their needs. There is good evidence that courses designed for on-campus use with school-leavers do not work, although this can be mitigated by insisting on entry qualifications or by aiming at homogeneous groups of adults - e.g. school teachers;

(b) courses especially designed for adults can be effective at any level of intellectual demand - community level, undergraduate, or post graduate;

(c) you don't have to insist on entrance qualifications - they do quite a bit better in the humanities than in education or science. And they do not do very well in mathematics. Without any qualifications, they fall by the wayside rather badly.

(2) If the target population is school-leavers:

(a) distance-learning is not, by itself, very efficient;

(b) materials designed for distance-learning can be efficiently used on campus by individualised self-paced instruction. These younger students then have the stimuli of mixing with fellow-students and of immediate access to a tutor.

(3) If the target adult population is small:

(a) the number of courses that can be originated for adults is similar. With 75,000 students in Britain we can originate about 90 of our courses (equivalent to about 225 Canadian courses).

To design a course that will be adequate for adults working in isolation is very expensive. It must be of high quality in content - for academics know that it will be open to the gaze of their peers and the critics of the press; but it must also be of high quality because if it is not of high quality the adult student will fail and it will bring the whole system to disrepute.

(4) One should always, if one is designing a system of this sort, make use of the mass communication systems already available.

I have been horrified when visiting institutions - especially in the USA where 10s of millions of dollars have been spent on sophisticated hardware communication systems designed for quite deplorably inadequate software. In the Open University we spent

all our money on the software and used existing systems of delivery. I think that is the right answer.

(5) Never use an expensive medium when a cheaper one will do.

(6) Do not try to compete with conventional systems but to complement them.

Never imagine that distance-learning is an alternate to the traditional systems. It is a complementary system and provides what they cannot provide - a chance for the adult in isolation. Can I end by saying that I have enjoyed my visit by coming to B.C. and I am very pleased that Dr. McGeer and I agreed in a letter of intent, to explore what we can do to help, if anything. This is the very beginning and not the end of a collaboration which I hope will be fruitful.

A P P E N D I X

Frank Fairchild Wesbrook Memorial Alumni
Lectureship Dinner
February 16, 1978

Program

Grace - Chancellor Donovan F. Miller

Toast to Her Majesty

Tribute to Dr. Frank Fairchild Wesbrook - Dr. W.C. Gibson
Professor, UBC

Introduction of Guest Speaker - Dr. Walter G. Hardwick
Deputy Minister of Education

Address: "Teaching and Learning at a Distance:
The Experience of Britain's Open University"
Sir Walter Perry, Vice Chancellor, Open University

Thanks to Guest Speaker - Miss Charlotte L.V. Warren
President, UBC Alumni Association